

CLAIMS

1. A method of processing postal items, which method consists, during a first pass for sorting the items, in taking (12) a digital picture of a postal item, in
5 deriving (15) from said picture a digital fingerprint (V-ID) which is a logic identifier for the item, and in storing the fingerprint of the item in a memory in correspondence with data about the item, and consists, during a second pass for sorting the items, in taking
10 again (51) a digital picture of a current mail item, in deriving (52) from said image a digital fingerprint for the current item, and in searching the fingerprints recorded in the first sorting pass for a match with the fingerprint of the current item in order to retrieve the
15 data about the item by association;

said method being characterized in that:

during the first sorting pass, said method further consists, in the memory, in associating (16) the fingerprints of the successive items with corresponding
20 chronological serial numbers (SN); and

during the second sorting pass, for a series of successive item fingerprints for which matches have been obtained with fingerprints recorded in the memory in the first sorting pass, said method further consists in
25 retrieving (61) a series (S1, S2) of corresponding chronological serial numbers, in computing (62, 65) an estimated chronological serial number for a current item from said series of chronological serial numbers, and in searching (63) for a match with the fingerprint of the
30 current item on the basis of the estimated chronological serial number.

2. A method according to claim 1, in which the computation of the estimated chronological serial number
35 consists in a linear approximation.

3. A method according to claim 2, in which two
chronological serial numbers are computed (65) by linear
approximation on the basis of two series of successive
item fingerprints, and a distance between the two
5 computed chronological serial numbers is measured.
4. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 3, in
which the search for a match is performed on the
fingerprints recorded in the first sorting pass in an
10 exploration space centered around the fingerprint
associated with a computed chronological serial number.
5. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 4, in
which the postal items are directed to the sorting outlet
15 bins of a sorting machine and in which the chronological
order is the order in which the items are loaded into the
sorting outlet bins.
6. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 5, in
20 which the chronological serial number is constituted by
the juxtaposition of a sorting center number, of a
sorting machine number, of a sorting outlet bin number,
and of a chronological index.
- 25 7. A machine for sorting postal items that is arranged to
implement the method according to any preceding claim.